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CIA Cover-up Bared On Help for Police

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For nearly three years, CIA officials largely ignored and delayed congressional requests for information about the agency's relationships with local police departments, documents obtained by The Washington Star show.

On several occasions from late 1972 through mid-1975, the CIA chose to give only sparse, general descriptions of its activities with local police rather than release the specific information sought by members of Congress and the press, according to the documents obtained by The Star under a Freedom of Information Act request.

Throughout the documents, CIA officials expressed a desire, as did several local police departments, to disguise such CIA assistance.

THE DOCUMENTS show that CIA officials were sensitive to the political implications of such assistance to local police. The documents also are rife with references to the CIA's belief that it had the authority to teach police techniques in safe-cracking, breaking and entering, wire-tapping and bugging.

In a March 16, 1973, document discussing inquiries from three Democratic congressmen, Reps. Edward I. Koch of New York, Phillip Burton of California and Dante B. Fascell of Florida, an unidentified CIA assistant deputy director of security blamed the inquiries on Koch.

"(Deleted) pointed out to the undersigned that Representative Koch had sent a letter to his colleagues saying something to the effect that here is what those nutty guys at CIA are doing and why don't you write to them about the police training they are giving in your area."

Koch had asked for details about training given to New York City police, while Burton inquired about San Francisco police and Fascell wanted to know about Miami area police.

A document written for the CIA Office of Legislative Counsel in early 1975 by Charles W. Kane, CIA director of security, said the CIA had failed to identify police departments by name for Koch. It also said that CIA use of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration as a "cover" for briefings to approximately 400 police departments

ADDITIONAL documents released to The Star yesterday by Koch also show that top CIA officials were aware that they had deliberately withheld information from congressmen.

An Aug. 1, 1975, letter to Koch from CIA Director William E. Colby said, "You may recall that on 9 January 1975, after certain revelations had been made concerning CIA training of members of the New York City Police Department, you requested that I provide you with the names of all the police agencies in the United States that had had similar training relationships with the agency.

"At that time, I advised you I could not provide the requested information because to do so would adversely affect important relationships that had been established on the basis of mutual confidentiality.

"I pointed out that I felt strongly that American individuals and organizations who cooperated willingly with the CIA on matters of mutual concern were entitled to have their relationship with the agency maintained on a private basis to the maximum extent feasible," Colby wrote.

"While I still believe that the position on which I based my original reply to you is a valid one, and that organizations and individuals are entitled to a confidential relationship with CIA if this is desired," Colby said, "certain recent events have resulted in some of the information you requested being made public. . . . Given this, I believe it is only proper that I provide you with the information you earlier requested."

IN A SEPT. 7, 1972, memo recommending discontinuance of police audio surveillance training, Howard J. Osborn, then the CIA director of security, cited the Watergate affair to Richard M. Helms, then the CIA director.

Osborn wrote, "If you agree, we can defer this aspect of police training to some future date after the Watergate incident has been put to bed one way or another.

"If you approve, I would like to continue these courses (in lock-picking and surveillance photography), quietly and discreetly. All police representatives attending are given a strong briefing on the Agency's passion for anonymity, and I know that our friendly police departments have always respected this and we have never had a leak of any kind."

Koch said yesterday, "I just wish the CIA wasn't such a bungling outfit. Sooner or later, what they do is going to get out anyway. When they cover up what shouldn't have been secret anyway, they are their own worst enemies because they discredit themselves. I wish they would level with Congress. When they request Congress to keep things secret that shouldn't be secret, they discredit any requests they have that might be legitimate."

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